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Promoting social integration through social inclusion

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 70/126 of 17 December 2015 on promoting social integration through social inclusion. The report focuses on social integration strategies for youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples in the following areas: promotion of economic, civil and political participation; inclusive participation in planning, implementing and monitoring processes; anti-discrimination measures; and further measures to advance social integration.

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, adopted the outcome document, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which it stresses the overarching aim of leaving no one behind. It includes the goal of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. To achieve that ambitious goal, additional efforts to promote social integration through social inclusion are needed.

2. Advancing social integration as part of the 2030 Agenda requires actions to advance the economic, political and social participation of disadvantaged social groups in society. Similarly, it is necessary to carry out a number of anti-discrimination measures and build a culture of inclusiveness.

3. The 2030 Agenda reflects the cross-cutting nature and importance of social inclusion, through the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and associated targets. In the resolution, Member States also acknowledged that the promotion of social inclusion was required to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions.

4. Member States identified several ways to promote social integration through social inclusion, in particular in the areas of economic, civil and political participation; participation of persons in vulnerable or marginalized groups or situations in planning, implementing and monitoring processes; and anti-discrimination measures, including removal of discriminatory laws, policies and practices to reduce inequalities (see resolution 70/1).

5. The present report has been issued pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/126 on promoting social integration through social inclusion. It aims to build upon the findings of five previous reports (E/CN.5/2009/2, E/CN.5/2010/2, E/CN.5/2011/2, A/68/169 and A/70/179), which provided detailed background on the concepts of social inclusion, integration and cohesion and focused on practical strategies to support them. The most recent reports focused on social protection, education institution-building and policy coherence (A/68/169) and on the promotion of active participation of people in civic, social, economic and political life, reducing inequalities and national institutions for the promotion of social inclusion and social integration (A/70/179).

6. The present report highlights recent national policies and programmes and good practices relating to social integration. In particular, it focuses on initiatives for youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples.

7. The report emphasizes efforts by Member States to promote inclusive participation, including in planning, implementing and monitoring processes. In addition, it describes recent anti-discrimination measures and other measures for advancing social integration, including United Nations system initiatives. The final part of the report contains conclusions and recommendations on advancing social integration through social inclusion in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

8. In accordance with the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 70/126 (para. 14), the Secretariat sought information from Member States and relevant actors of the United Nations system. The Secretariat received responses from the Governments of Austria, Azerbaijan, Czechia, Georgia, Hungary, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines and the Sudan. In addition, inputs were provided by the Economic Commission for Europe, the International Telecommunications Union and the World Food Programme.

II. Social integration strategies at the national and regional levels

9. Some Governments pursue specific national mechanisms for social inclusion. Such strategies often consist of an action plan at the national level and strategies promoting the inclusion of particular social groups. Under the overall national plan, action at the local level is implemented through local bodies. To illustrate, a national mechanism for the promotion of social inclusion has been active in Romania, within its national commission on social inclusion. It comprises high-level representatives from all ministries, agencies and other relevant governmental institutions. Locally, the country commissions on social inclusion are responsible for drafting local plans on social inclusion and protection and for ensuring their implementation.

10. In Mexico, the national inclusion strategy (Estrategia Nacional de Inclusión) is a coordination and cooperation mechanism between Government entities, civil society, the private sector and academia. It fosters actions guaranteeing the effective exercise of social rights of the most vulnerable groups, in line with international human rights instruments, especially in the areas of education, health, social security, nutrition and decent housing.

11. In Peru, the interventions under the policy for social development and inclusion of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion have a life cycle perspective and cover child nutrition, early childhood development, integral child and youth development, economic inclusion and protection of older persons. In addition, the fund for the economic inclusion of rural areas (Fondo para la Inclusión Económica en Zonas Rurales) promotes the quality of life in remote areas by investments in sanitation, electrification and telecommunications.

A. Promotion of economic, civil and political participation

12. Promoting participation to ensure inclusion ranks high on Government agendas. Inclusion and participation are concepts often used in different contexts, mostly relating to groups traditionally excluded from mainstream society. Participation often implies involvement in matters affecting oneself and society. Inclusion and participation are intrinsically linked through their connections to the concepts of equality and non-discrimination. It is through active participation in economic, political, social and cultural life of a society that social inclusion can be advanced. Moreover, involving different social groups in tackling issues that affect them proves that their participation is valuable and benefits society.

13. Some Governments have established specific social inclusion strategies, with an overarching objective of ensuring participation. In Czechia, the social inclusion strategy aims to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, promoting the participation of citizens in relevant processes, involvement of civil society, social partners and people from vulnerable groups themselves. In Mexico, the social co-investment programme (Programa de Coinversión Social) strengthens cooperation between social actors, promoting the social cohesion and human development of indigenous peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities, children and youth, with a human rights perspective.

1. Civil and political participation

Youth

14. Over the past two decades, declining membership in political parties and low voter turnout in Western countries has led to concerns over the future of liberal

democracies. There is a trend away from formal participation, especially among young people. To respond to the crisis of formal political participation, Governments are eager to formulate policies promoting participation, especially of young people. Influenced by the children's rights movement, as well as development and participant-centred approaches, the youth participation agenda has emerged.[1]

15. Youth participation and representation in institutional political processes and policymaking remain comparatively low. Young people lack sufficient representation within formal political structures and consequently have low rates of parliamentary involvement, political party participation and electoral activity. What's more, countries often lack regulatory mechanisms facilitating youth participation, and only individuals aged 25 years or above are eligible to run for parliament.[2]

16. Such exclusion of youth from formal process jeopardizes the legitimacy of political systems and structures, as many remain unrepresented or underrepresented, leading young people to find other means of political engagement, with social media and information and communication technologies providing new and innovative outlets.[3]

17. The use of new forms of communications via the Internet can also contribute to better citizenship and the inclusion of youth in governance processes. For instance, online activities such as seeking candidate information have predicted high voter turnout among youth.[4]

18. Policies supporting civic participation of youth are usually embodied by programmes promoting youth development, involvement and enterprise. Youth participation is typically measured within the educational, work and political systems. In political systems, it is measured by voter turnout and political party participation. However, other approaches take into account the degree of young persons' civic-mindedness as it relates to civil society participation. In turn, civil society has advanced concepts and practices of youth participation through the role of youth in research, service delivery and advocacy.[1]

19. Member States promote different aspects of youth participation. Italy supports civic education, volunteering and youth mobility through its youth camps project and the National Civic Service. Costa Rica uses sports-based initiatives to ensure inclusion of indigenous and minority youth. In Togo, emphasis is placed on youth volunteerism in the development of experience and skills which contribute to young people's economic development (see A/70/156, para. 23). To promote political participation among young people, some countries lowered the voting age or reserved seats in parliament for youth.[5]

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[1] Philippa Collin, *Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society: Addressing the Democratic Disconnect* (United Kingdom, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[2] United Nations, "World youth report: youth civic engagement", pp. 60-62 and 95 (New York, 2016). Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr/2015/report.pdf.

[3] See United Nations, "World youth report: youth civic engagement" (New York, 2016).

[4] Jessica T. Feezel, Meredith Conroy and Mario Guerrero, "Internet use and political participation: engaging citizenship norms through online activities", *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, vol. 13, No. 2 (28 March 2016).

[5] Austria and Liberia, respectively; see E/CN.5/2017/5, para. 48. See also "Signaling a boost for gender equality, Liberia passes the 'Affirmative Action Bill'", available from http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/10/liberia-passes-the-affirmative-action-bill; and, in regard to Austria, *The Economist*, 4 February 2017, available from https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21716030-young-voters-are-becoming-disillusioned-elections-catch-them-early-and-teach-them-value.

20. Youth participation approaches often focus on cultural and structural barriers to participation embodied in institutions that have authority over young people. There has been a significant growth in initiatives to promote youth-led social action and enterprise. Many programmes include youth-led initiatives and youth-servicing non-governmental organization programmes, as well as a number of new corporate/non-governmental organization initiatives that train, mentor and seed fund young people to develop youth agency.

21. The International Youth Foundation, the charity Nesta in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Social Ventures Australia support education, work and business skills and youth-led social ventures. In Australia, programmes such as Ausyouth, Green Corps and Work for the Dole have used participation as a strategy for youth development, especially for improving pathways to employment.[1]

22. Civil society plays an increasing role in promoting youth participation and tends to be adapting more readily than traditional institutions to the preferences of the networked young citizens. In the United Kingdom, the British Youth Council empowers young people in community decision-making. Its flagship project, Young Mayors Network, comprises directly elected young mayors to create a network of support in getting their voices heard on the national stage. Activities include group lobbying, collaborative projects and campaigns, as well as sharing ideas relating to regional and international practices.[6] The Council also coordinates campaigns and advocacy programmes, research and training to promote young people's involvement in their communities and in democratic processes at the local, national and international levels.

23. Partnerships between the Government and civil society to promote youth participation have been successfully adopted in some countries. For instance, in Scotland the Government and the non-governmental organization Children in Scotland collaborate on the project "Community hubs on self-directed support". The project aims to raise awareness among children, youth and families and enable them to make informed decisions regarding their use of the Social Care (Self-directed Support) Scotland Act 2013. The Act empowers children, youth and their families to choose how their support is provided.[7]

Older persons

24. Recent economic, social and demographic changes have contributed to some increase in civic and political involvement among older persons. Nevertheless, older persons often feel excluded from mainstream politics and societal debates and failed by representative democracy and existing development frameworks. High voter turnout among older persons has helped to ensure that their concerns are addressed in some countries. In many others, however, older persons who regularly exercise their right to vote feel that their voices have not been heard (see A/67/188, para. 21).

25. In Jamaica, economic, civil and political rights are protected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. They are strengthened in the National Policy for Senior Citizens and are key principles and themes which undergird the Policy. The Vision 2030: National Development Plan aims to create an inclusive society in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. The National Council for Senior Citizens implements programmes and activities that showcase the work and worth of older persons, advocate for their

[6] Available from www.byc.org.uk.

[7] Available from http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/project/community-hubs-on-self-directed-support.

rights and promote their full participation in all aspects of life. The Council also promotes intergenerational exchanges, income-generating projects and social activities.

26. The number of civil society organizations led by or dedicated to the development of older persons at the national and international levels is low. In the majority of cases their capacity to interact with Governments and influence policy on behalf of their constituents is low as well. Many organizations that do exist at the national level in developing countries are focused mostly on the provision of welfare-type services for older persons (see E/CN.5/2014/4, para. 53).

27. Nonetheless, a number of organizations of older persons have built strong constituencies in the past several decades. The American Association of Retired Persons, in the United States of America, and HelpAge International, based in the United Kingdom, have been influential in shaping programmes and policies benefiting older persons. They also provide their members and older persons at large with targeted information and, in some cases, services relating to all aspects of personal, social and economic life in older age (see A/67/188).

Persons with disabilities

28. Inclusion and participation are practices with a special meaning in the context of disability movements and children's rights, being essential to the education of children with disabilities and moving away from the segregation and integration that only tolerates children with special needs in the classroom.[8]

29. In Mexico, the National Council for the Development and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is charged with mainstreaming disability issues in all aspects of life and ensuring that persons with disabilities can participate as active agents in their personal and social lives. Its national programme for development and inclusion of persons with disabilities 2017-2018 focuses on ensuring the economic, civil and political participation of persons with disabilities.

30. In some countries, civil and political participation is promoted through technological innovations. For instance, following the examples of the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries, the parliament of Canada launched a new e-petition system,[9] integrating a number of domestic and private online petitions into one governmental channel.[10] Such systems are especially useful for persons with disabilities.

Indigenous peoples

31. Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making through their traditional and national governments. Some Governments, like Denmark, recognize indigenous peoples' traditional government institutions with which they have established formal relationships. The nature of those relationships varies from country to country. There are (or have been) indigenous members of parliament in some countries, including Bangladesh, Burundi, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal and the Philippines. Indigenous parliaments have been established in Finland, Norway and Sweden for the Sami peoples.

[8] Tali Gal and Benedetta Faedi Duramy, eds., *International Perspectives and Empirical Findings on Child Participation. From Social Exclusion to Child-Inclusive Policies* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2015).

[9] Kennedy Stewart, "E-petitions put Canadians in control of the political agenda", *The Huffington Post*, updated 23 March 2016, accessed 10 April 2017. Available from http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/kennedy-stewart/electronic-petitioning-canada_b_9521506.html.

[10] Available from http://petitions.parl.gc.ca.

32. Indigenous peoples have primarily been active, however, at the local, municipal and rural levels. Legal reforms aimed at the recognition of the intercultural character of States, the promotion of women's leadership and the establishment of mechanisms for binding political dialogue between indigenous peoples, private initiatives, parliaments and Governments are necessary steps towards the full civil and political participation of indigenous peoples (see E/C.19/2014/6).

2. Economic participation of social groups

33. Access to jobs represents the most effective tool for social inclusion, as decent jobs empower citizens and enable them to lead a productive life. Hence, in some countries, measures to boost education, vocational training and apprenticeships have been implemented. Fiscal and legal frameworks aimed at supporting the business environment have also been introduced.

34. Economic participation is often promoted through employment support services. The Twinning programme in Georgia (see http://eu-nato.gov.ge/en/page/twinning) aims to strengthen the institutional and human resource capacities of the employment support services to deliver well-targeted, high-quality, gender-sensitive and cost-effective services to job seekers. Employment centres provide job seekers with information, counselling, registration and employment promotion and training programmes. Participation of the less competitive workforce is the priority during the implementation of vocational training programmes for the unemployed.

35. In Azerbaijan, the introduction of an electronic system for registration of employment contracts has significantly contributed to building a complete database on the labour market and labour relations, legalization of illegal employment and protection of employee rights. It has also increased revenues for the State budget and fees for mandatory social insurance and has enabled better protection of workers' rights.

36. In Hungary, the job protection action plan regulates various options for the employment of disadvantaged groups, such as employees under the age of 25 and above the age of 55, long-term job seekers, those returning from maternity leave and people of Roma origin.

37. As young people typically experience the greatest difficulty finding employment and are three times more likely than older adults to be unemployed, their economic participation is a challenge in many countries. Governments have made tackling youth unemployment and underemployment a priority and have made efforts to promote youth entrepreneurship and create internship programmes for young people to acquire marketable skills.

38. According to the International Labour Organization, entrepreneurship programmes tend to help disadvantaged youth to work their way out of poverty, while public works schemes provide short-term opportunities for young people.[11] Access to credit, microfinance and capital remains crucial to improving the economic participation of youth and can serve to encourage youth entrepreneurship, given that young people are frequently considered as high risk by lenders in the light of their lack of business experience and financial collateral.

39. At the national level, countries support youth economic participation by encouraging employment initiatives, entrepreneurship and youth skill training. Such

[11] See statement by the ILO at the 55th session of the Commission for Social Development. Available from http://papersmart.unmeetings.org/ecosoc/csocd/fifty-fifth-session/statements/.

initiatives can be effective for combating youth unemployment and underemployment and poverty and for meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

40. Economic inclusion efforts in Peru focus, inter alia, on improving access to the labour market, through capacity-building for young people, investment in information and communications technology, support for small businesses in vulnerable areas and technical assistance.

41. At the regional level, the European Union launched a new youth initiative, "Investing in Europe's Youth", focused on employment, education, learning mobility and solidarity. To increase the economic participation of young persons, the initiative proposed action regarding: the creation of the European Solidarity Corps; the full and sustainable implementation of the Youth Guarantee scheme, particularly for low-qualified and vulnerable youth with complex needs, including those with disabilities; and the creation of the programme, Erasmus Pro, to support long-term mobility of youth apprentices.

42. The African Union Summit, "Harnessing the demographic dividend through investment in youth", held in July 2017, endorsed the establishment of the African Union youth fund for projects harnessing the demographic dividend, particularly of girls and young women, and authorized allocation to the fund of at least 1 per cent of the programme budget of the African Union.

43. States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted a five-year workplan on youth 2016-2020, focusing mainly on youth entrepreneurship and employability. Governments in the region are working on the development of an ASEAN youth development index, which will help to enhance the conceptualization and evaluation of the outcomes and effectiveness of youth initiatives.

44. Economic participation through employment is as important to the social integration of older persons as it is for other social groups. In developed countries, older persons close to retirement may wish to remain economically active even if they have sufficient resources to retire on. In developing countries, older persons often want to remain employed out of necessity, to secure their livelihoods. Whatever the case may be, the right of right older persons to remain in employment should be upheld (see A/68/167). It is estimated that by 2030, the number of older workers in the labour force will increase by a further 270 million to almost 750 million workers, or to over 18 per cent of the total labour force.[12]

45. Member States have recognized the economic benefits of longer employment of older persons and have adopted measures to support their economic participation. National employment and retirement provisions to extend working life have been enacted in some countries, with several adopting legislation that increases the retirement age progressively.

46. In Australia, France, Greece, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and the United Kingdom legislation has been passed to increase the pensionable age progressively for both men and women. Denmark introduced a law that raises the official retirement age from 65 to 67 in the period 2019-2022. Furthermore, several countries have removed or are planning to remove restrictions on the concurrent receipt of a pension and income from work (see A/68/167).

47. Moreover, increasingly, financial incentives, in the form of tax breaks or credit, are being offered to employers who recruit, retrain or re-employ older

[12] International Labour Office, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2015* (Geneva, 2015). Available from http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2015/WCMS_337069/lang--en/index.htm.

workers. Japan has increased employment opportunities for older persons through an amendment to its law regarding the stabilization of employment of older persons, which entered into force in 2013, requiring companies to secure employment for those wishing to work until age 65.

48. In Mexico, the national institute of older persons (Instituto Nacional de las Personas Adultas Mayores), promotes human development of older persons. It offers programmes benefiting older persons economically, for example, through discount and nutrition cards, medical assistance and access to credit. The institute also supports active ageing centres and promotes participation in the labour market.

49. In Jamaica, the National Policy for Senior Citizens is currently under revision, in keeping with the Government's commitment to establish a comprehensive social protection strategy, including adequate safety nets, mitigating risks to economic and social development. The objective is to integrate older persons into development across all sectors and to align policy with Vision 2030 (see para. 25) and with emerging priorities at the local, regional and global levels. At its core lies a life-course intergenerational approach to policy that stresses equity, reciprocity and inclusiveness of all age groups in all policy areas.

50. In Mexico, the National System for Development and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, established in 2016, fosters policies, programmes and actions for persons with disabilities.

51. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10754 — An Act Expanding the Benefits and Privileges of Persons with Disability of 27 July 2015 entitles persons with disabilities to exemptions from value-added tax on the sale of selected goods and services; educational assistance; special discounts on commodities; and tax incentives for those caring for and living with persons with disabilities.

52. In some countries, new legislation enlarging the autonomy of persons with disabilities has been enacted. In 2016, Germany adopted the German Federal Participation Act (Bundesteilhabegesetz), which broadens the autonomy of persons with disabilities from the community to personal levels and supports employers hiring persons with disabilities.[13]

53. In Stockholm, Sweden, the participation programme for people with disabilities 2011-2016 is a directive for city committees and company boards to increase the accessibility of persons with disabilities to the city's indoor and outdoor environments and e-services. It also aims to increase the proportion of students with disabilities in school and their participation in leisure and other activities.[14]

54. Recent legislative initiatives in Japan, including the Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities of 2013 and an act on employment promotion, etc. of persons with disabilities (2014) established quotas for persons with disabilities. The law also requires employers to provide accommodation and facilities appropriate for employees with disabilities.[15]

55. In Azerbaijan, the introduction of the electronic system for registering people with disabilities and assigning disability status (Subsystem for Medical and Social Expertise and Rehabilitation) fosters a transparent environment for medical and

[13] See Ben Knight, "Activists angry as Germany passes contentious disability law", *Deutsche Welle*, 1 December 2016. Available from http://www.dw.com/en/activists-angry-as-germany-passes-contentious-disability-law/a-36606791.

[14] Stockholms Stad, "Stockholm — a city for everyone: participation programme for people with disabilities 2011-2016" (2011). Available from www.stockholm.se.

[15] Mutsuko Asakura, "Prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment", *Waseda Bulletin of Comparative Law*, vol. 34, chap. 2 (2014). Available from http://www.waseda.jp/folaw/icl/assets/uploads/2016/02/d08da3c0259ba3ee3cefdf2d7cbb76e5.pdf.

social expertise. The assessment of disability is conducted by means of a notice issued by a public health institution that reflects all functional diagnostics, laboratory results, history of therapy, clinical prognosis, and the like. To ensure fairness of decisions, the system forwards an anonymous notice to several randomly chosen medical and social expert commissions for assessment of the disability. The system also automatically tracks the duration of different degrees of disability.

56. Indigenous peoples across the world work to improve the conditions in their communities, lands and territories. Many indigenous peoples are involved in civic and economic activities to protect and revitalize their cultures, languages and traditions. Increasingly, indigenous peoples mobilize to protect the environment and their communities from dispossession of land, extraction of natural resources, megaprojects and deforestation of their lands and territories. Many indigenous environmental activists promote alternative visions of development that place a primacy on sustainability, human rights and the rights of Mother Earth, such as the concept of "vivir bien" (living well).[16]

57. In Peru, the strategy for social action with sustainability (Estrategia de Acción Social con Sostenibilidad) focuses on improving the living conditions of indigenous populations of the Amazon. In particular, it promotes economic inclusion of households and facilitates access to health and education services.

B. Inclusive participation in planning, implementing and monitoring processes

58. In terms of inclusive participatory and representative decision-making processes, some countries have a long tradition of tripartite consultations between the Government and the most representative organizations of employers and workers. In Czechia, such negotiations are conducted within the advisory body of the Government, the Council of Economic and Social Agreement.

Youth

59. Many Governments recognize that young people should be actively involved in the design, development and implementation of youth policies and programmes. Governments ensure youth involvement by fostering information-sharing and including young people in decision-making at all stages of the policymaking process, making sure that youth participation is substantive and consistent (see E/CN.5/2017/5).

60. Moreover, the active participation of young people in the consultative processes for the development, implementation and evaluation of national policies and plans affecting their lives makes those policies and processes more transparent and legitimate. It also helps to accurately reflect youth's current needs and challenges. What's more, it is increasingly being recognized that the involvement of young people should not be confined to youth-related policies but could be expanded to all policies that have implications for them (ibid.).

61. Several Member States, such as Austria, Azerbaijan and Canada, recognize the importance of ensuring the active involvement of young people in decision-making and policy development. In some countries, including Libya, the Republic of Korea

[16] United Nations, background note on indigenous human rights defenders for the sixteenth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, held in New York from 24 April to 5 May 2017. Available from https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2016/08/Indigenous-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf.

and Sri Lanka, mechanisms for youth participation in decision-making have been developed (ibid.).

62. To foster the participation of young people in institutional structures, several countries have also initiated municipal, regional or national participation mechanisms to engage with issues affecting their communities. They include youth parliaments or advisory bodies that contribute to the work of national assemblies or parliaments. Large-scale consultations, surveys and forums carried out with young people and youth-led organizations are used by Member States to inform their work, policies and decision-making processes.[17]

Older persons

63. National strategies, action plans or specific legislation concerning older persons geared towards particular areas such as non-discrimination or the right to health have been enacted in some countries. To target the strategy, policy or law to the needs and concerns of older persons, the involvement of older persons in the formulation of such strategies is essential.

64. Older persons can be included in decision-making processes either through consultative bodies, which may consist of members of civil society representing the interests of older persons, or through comprehensive consultative processes between the Government and older persons, such as public consultations, working groups or more targeted focus groups (see A/HRC/33/44, para. 29).

65. Older persons monitoring at the grass-roots level enables them to monitor and implement policies and services affecting their lives and use the evidence to advocate for change. It supports older persons in taking the lead in documenting the challenges they encounter, so that they can hold their Governments accountable for the fulfilment of their human rights.

66. In several countries, older citizens monitoring groups play an important role in grievance redress mechanisms of the Governments. Such a citizen-led accountability approach is supported by a variety of donor countries and the World Bank through its Global Partnership for Social Accountability. Civil society organizations support associations of older persons by raising awareness about the human rights of older persons, as well as the laws and policies that affect them.

67. Several good practices deserve particular mention. For instance, improved transparency in the allocation of social allowances at the community level led to an increase in the old age allowance in Bangladesh. In Bolivia, older persons register for health insurance schemes thanks to public awareness campaigns by older citizens monitoring groups. In Kyrgyzstan the groups provided evidence for consultations on the Government's new poverty reduction and social protection strategies. Local advocacy in the United Republic of Tanzania led to increased funding for non-communicable diseases and geriatric health units. In Pakistan, data on older citizens monitoring groups was used to lobby humanitarian organizations to respond to the needs of older persons in their emergency responses.[18]

Persons with disabilities

68. Participation in political and public life by persons with disabilities was on the agenda of the nineteenth session of the Human Rights Council, held in Geneva from 27 February-23 March 2012, with a view to establishing the normative content of

[17] Examples of such mechanisms are provided in E/CN.5/2017/5, sect. IV.

[18] HelpAge International, "Older citizen monitoring". Available from http://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/older-citizen-monitoring/.

political rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to vote and to be elected, the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs and the right to have access to public service (see A/HRC/19/36, paras. 3-12). Accordingly, the Government of Australia developed monitoring indicators for its National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. The policy aims to ensure that persons with disability have every opportunity to be active participants in the civic life of the community as jurors, board members and elected representatives.[19]

69. Persons with an intellectual or physical disability struggle to exercise their rights to vote in many countries. In the United States, approximately 30 million persons with disabilities are eligible to vote, but they are 20 per cent less likely to vote. The American Association of People with Disabilities' campaign raises public awareness of the issue.[20]

Indigenous peoples

70. Indigenous communities have played a crucial role in preserving their local environment and heritage, but top-down national heritage preservation frameworks often limit their participation in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, efforts are under way to empower indigenous people to participate in a number of decision-making processes affecting their lives.

71. Member States, in the outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/2 of 22 September 2014, committed themselves to the empowerment of indigenous women and to formulating and implementing, in collaboration with indigenous peoples, in particular indigenous women and their organizations, policies and programmes designed to promote capacity-building and strengthen their leadership. They expressed their support for measures that would ensure the full and effective participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes and eliminate barriers to their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life (para. 17).

72. In Nepal, the traditional *guthi* system features an inclusive decision-making process reflecting indigenous people's knowledge and sense of autonomy and promoting the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage.[21] In Peru, the Law on the Right of Consultation of Indigenous Peoples enables indigenous people to open a consultation process between the community and the Government in regard to any activity, plan, administrative or legal measures, or development project affecting their ancestral indigenous territories.[22]

C. Anti-discrimination measures

73. The principle of non-discrimination applied in international human rights law obligates Governments to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Overtly discriminatory laws are rapidly becoming a thing of the past, and Governments are working to implement anti-discriminatory laws and policies promoting the well-

[19] Commonwealth of Australia, *2010-2020 National Disability Strategy* (2011).

[20] Available from http://www.aapd.com/press-releases/aapd-announces-rev-campaign-making-disability-vote-count/.

[21] Krishna K. Shrestha and others, eds., *Inclusive Urbanization: Rethinking Policy, Practice and Research in the Age of Climate Change* (New York, Routledge, 2015).

[22] Graciela Rodriguez-Ferrand, "Peru: new law granting right of consultation to indigenous peoples, *Global Legal Monitor*, 27 September 2011. Available from http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/peru-new-law-granting-right-of-consultation-to-indigenous-peoples/.

being of and giving voice to disadvantaged groups.[25] In some countries new institutions to implement anti-discriminatory measures have been created.

74. In Czechia, the Government has established several specialized advisory councils, such as the Inter-ministerial Commission for Roma Community Affairs, the Government Council for Human Rights and the Government Council for National Minorities, focused on inclusion and equal opportunities of people from vulnerable groups. Czechia has also established the institution of Public Defender of Rights (the ombudsperson).

75. In Mexico, the national programme for equality and non-discrimination, 2014-2018, established guidelines for all public administration at the federal level to eliminate all forms of discrimination arising from social exclusion, historical discrimination and poverty.

76. The Government of Georgia has committed to strengthening social dialogue and amending the labour code so that labour standards in Georgia are in compliance with international standards. Amendments are also being made to other laws dealing with the elimination of all forms of discrimination and social protection of people with disabilities.

77. Indigenous youth, youth in rural areas, youth with disabilities and young migrants are potentially at greater risk of marginalization and social exclusion (see E/CN.5/2017/5, para. 55). To promote social inclusion of youth, policymakers can factor the concerns and needs of young people from marginalized groups into participatory processes as essential stakeholders.

78. The distinct concerns of marginalized groups are sometimes reflected in national youth policy and youth-related legislation (for example, in Austria, Azerbaijan and Swaziland). In Austria, legislation and corresponding policy frameworks ensure that minority groups are represented in participatory mechanisms, and in Lithuania and Switzerland frameworks to combat poverty and discrimination have been created (ibid., para. 60).

79. Member States continue to focus on disadvantages faced by marginalized groups in their programming, particularly regarding youth with disabilities, indigenous youth and young migrants. In Mexico the No Hate/Sin Odio campaign has targeted young people and aims to counteract expressions of hate affecting various populations, including migrants and groups affected by discrimination owing to their sexual orientation, both in physical spaces and in digital media.

80. Some countries have adopted laws banning discrimination against older persons in employment practices and the workplace. Comprehensive laws prohibiting age discrimination in various areas of public life, including housing, education and employment, and even the provision of goods, services and facilities, such as loans, mortgages and insurance, have also been enacted. Enforcing the right to non-discrimination requires complaint mechanisms, and in some cases that competence is conferred on equality bodies. It is important that equality bodies, such as commissioners or ombudspersons, be established by law to monitor age discrimination and advocate for its elimination across all areas of public life (see A/HRC/33/44, para. 63).

81. In some countries measures have been taken to protect older persons against discrimination in employment. For example, in the Philippines, the 2016 Act Prohibiting Discrimination against Any Individual in Employment on Account of

[25] See United Nations, *Leaving No One Behind: the Imperative of Inclusive Development: Report on the World Social Situation 2016*, chap. IV. Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf.

Age and Providing Penalties Therefor, prohibits arbitrary discrimination in employment on account of age. The legislation also mandates studies and programmes by the Department of Labour and Employment to minimize impediments to the employment of older persons and enhance the knowledge and skills of every individual regardless of age.

82. In Jamaica, the national policy adopts a productive ageing model congruent with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and highlights the value of older persons to the family and society. Public education is promoted to reduce ageism and other forms of discrimination through seminars, workshops and the media.

83. Civil society plays an important role in fighting ageism and discrimination against older persons though public information campaigns. HelpAge International has been actively campaigning to stop age discrimination through its Age Demands Action campaign.

84. Governments continue to take action in respect of discrimination persons with disabilities. In Jamaica, the Disabilities Act, 2014, provides for freedom, equality, tolerance and respect for persons with disabilities. Universal access to basic education, public infrastructure and facilities and information are ensured under the Act.

85. In Brazil, Costa Rica, Ghana, South Africa and Uganda various legal frameworks ranging from anti-discrimination in employment legislation to ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities are being implemented. Legal frameworks for equal pay for equal work have been adopted in Brazil, Cuba and Mongolia, while training of trade union leaders on disability rights promotion has been undertaken in Ethiopia and Zambia.[24]

86. The General Assembly, by its resolution 61/295 of 13 September 2007, adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Since then, some countries have developed constitutional and legislative measures recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples. However, progress on the ground has been slow, and in many countries, indigenous peoples are still not recognized. The first step to overcome exclusion is to address the lack of recognition and the remaining discriminatory laws and practices.

87. With the promulgation of the 2011 Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Right of the Indigenous Populations, the Congo became the first country in Africa to promote a law on protection of indigenous peoples. It prohibits enslavement of and all forms of discrimination against indigenous peoples, and all forms of education, information and manifestations which have adverse effects on the cultural identity, history and aspirations of the populations.[25]

88. Despite legal and institutional actions to end discriminatory laws and practices, discrimination often has deep cultural roots. Even in countries with non-discriminatory and protective laws, prejudice, stereotypes and discriminatory practices are common, with some individuals and groups still subject to bias, negative attitudes and stereotyping. Measuring prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours is then necessary to realize the scope of the problem and find solutions in addition to legal measures.[26]

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[24] United Nations, "Global status report on disability and development", 2015.

[25] International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, "Indigenous peoples in the Republic of the Congo". Available from www.iwgia.org/regions/africa/republic-of-congo.

[26] See *Report on the World Social Situation 2016*, p. 109. Available from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/full-report.pdf.

III. Further measures to advance social integration, including United Nations system initiatives

Integration of vulnerable groups

89. Socially excluded people are often denied the opportunities available to others to improve their livelihood and escape from poverty on their own. Under the right circumstances, however, they can become key drivers in the sustainable development of societies and in poverty eradication. For example, numerous studies have shown that in the long run, migrants help to expand the tax base, energize labour markets and generate new demand for goods and services. It is therefore imperative for States to adopt policies to avoid the social exclusion of marginalized groups, such as migrants.

90. In Austria the integration of migrants has grown in importance in recent years. The National Action Plan for Integration, adopted in 2010, focuses on integration based on participation in economic, social, political and cultural processes, as well as compliance with relevant obligations. The plan consists of several fields of action, including language and education, work and employment, and rule of law, as well as values, health and social issues, intercultural dialogue, sports and leisure, housing and the regional dimension of integration. Each dimension has clearly defined challenges, principles and goals. The Action Plan targets society at large as well as persons with a migrant background.

91. In addition, the "integration through performance" approach of Austria means that people should not be judged on the basis of their background, but on their contribution to the host country. The general emphasis is on creating appropriate conditions for integration and dismantling prejudices and stereotypes, while motivating immigrants and inspiring them to have confidence in their prospects of achievement in Austria.

92. In Germany, the Government funded a pilot project called "jmd2start — advice for young refugees", providing 7.1 million Euros for the period 2015-2017.[27] The project helps young refugees to be better integrated in society, providing advice relating to asylum application, education, work training, health service and sport projects. It includes an online system comprising an information portal for young refugees, an arrival app, online self-study courses in the German language and video training in Arabic.[28]

93. Social integration of the Roma people in Europe poses many challenges. The Government of Hungary established a reconciliation council for Roma affairs, a forum for direct dialogue given the task of reviewing the implementation of past measures through feedback from stakeholders and determination of further actions necessary for the inclusion of Roma.

Gender equality

94. A gender perspective is essential to address social integration and inclusion, especially through women's economic empowerment. There is a need to improve awareness of the situation of women and women entrepreneurs and of the importance of a gender-sensitive policy environment in the workplace.

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[27] See Germany, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, "2016 strategic social reporting — Germany".

[28] Germany, Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth, *Information Online*. Available from http://www.jmd2start.de/modellprojekt/information-online.

95. In Mexico, the National Institute for Women works to guarantee gender equality. Through its programme — Women PYME — it offers preferential credits to women entrepreneurs to contribute to their economic autonomy. The observatory of political participation of women in Mexico (Observatorio de Participación Política de las Mujeres en México) disseminates information on political and electoral rights of women at the federal, state and municipal levels and on removing the obstacles to women's political participation. The national programme for equality of opportunities and non-discrimination against women, 2013-2018 aims to achieve gender equality through participatory democracy, planning and budgeting.

Inclusive education

96. The value of an inclusive approach to the education of children with disabilities is increasingly recognized. The United Kingdom has adopted an inclusive approach through the co-location of special and mainstream schools to strengthen the interaction among students with mixed abilities and non-disabled students, as well as with teachers. In addition, curriculums have been adapted to teaching methods and forms of assessment that cover a wide range of learning needs.[29]

97. In the United States a twin-track approach exists, aimed at placing children in the most integrated setting possible, while providing for more specialized placement where this is considered necessary.[30] In Bulgaria, it was found that the budget per child educated in a special school can be up to three times higher than for a similar child in a regular school.[31] This shows that segregating is not necessarily cost-effective compared with inclusive education.

Human rights education

98. Many Member States have elaborated national action plans and strategies for human rights education. To support those efforts, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has developed specific tools, including guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education and a handbook on national human rights plans of action. Some plans or strategies focus on specific sectors, such as the school system, or target specific audiences, such as professionals, vulnerable groups or the general public.[32] For instance, the National Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights in the Sudan 2013-2023 focuses, inter alia, on educational policies, development of the syllabus and special training for teachers.[33]

99. In addition, a national dialogue programme has been launched in the Sudan with the theme "Sudan, a nation for all". Some of the issues covered include peace and unity, economy, freedom and political rights, and governance. Respect for diversity is stressed as discrimination against minorities and their marginalization are considered crimes against human rights and a threat to peace.

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[29] See Hazel Bines and Philippa Lei, "Disability and education: the longest road to inclusio ", *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 31, No. 5 (September 2011).

[30] See World Health Organization, *World Report on Disability*, p. 210 (Geneva, 2011). Available from http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/.

[31] United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities* (New York, 2013). Available from https://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/files/SWCR2013_ENG_Lo_res_24_Apr_2013.pdf.

[32] See OHCHR, "National action plans for human rights education". Available from http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Pages/NationalActionPlansHumanRightsEducation.aspx.

[33] Advisory Council on Human Rights. Available from http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Education/Training/actions-plans/Excerpts/Sudan2013-2023.pdf.

Digital inclusion

100. Digital inclusion refers to ensuring access to information and communications technology (ICT), and to its use for the social and economic development of persons with specific needs. Despite the expanding deployment of telecommunications networks, many women and girls, persons with disabilities, youth, children and indigenous peoples remain excluded from full participation in the information society.

101. People with specific needs often face barriers to using information and communications technology. Persons with specific disabilities may not be able to see screens, hear sound on a phone or input commands to a mouse, computer or touch screen phone. These barriers can be overcome when the technology is accessible and affordable. Women, youth and indigenous peoples who are not currently online often require basic and advanced digital literacy training along with an understanding of how to use information and communications technology for their social and economic empowerment.

102. Barriers faced by people with specific needs can be removed through effective laws, policies, national broadband plans, regulations and business practices, as well as through information and communications technology training and development strategies that take into account the specific needs of women, girls, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities to ensure an inclusive information society.

103. A number of measures have strengthened the capacity of Member States to develop and implement digital inclusion policies, strategies and guidelines to ensure access to information and communications technology for persons with disabilities. For instance, the *Model ICT Accessibility Policy Report*[34] is now available in all 6 official International Telecommunication Union (ITU) languages to facilitate its use by countries around the globe and dissemination among members and organizations of persons with disabilities, such as the World Federation of the Deaf and the Pacific Disability Forum. The *Report* is used both to raise awareness of the types of information and communications technology accessibility policies that ITU members can adopt and to build their capacity to implement such policies.

Public-private partnerships

104. The private sector needs to be engaged in the creation of appropriate infrastructure and the provision of social services to advance social integration and inclusion. Collaboration between the private and public sectors, such as well-structured public-private partnerships can make an important contribution to overcoming resource constraints and mobilizing necessary expertise in multiple areas, including health, education or infrastructure. However, it is essential that the arrangements reflect the needs of the populations they aim to serve.

105. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) promotes "people-first" public-private partnerships, developing standard approaches and best practice models. The standards are being developed with the collaboration of experts from national Governments, academia, the private sector, civil society and other international organizations. "Promoting people first: public-private partnerships for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals"[35] refers to projects that support the 2030 Agenda. One of the criteria used is the degree to which projects engage with all

[34] ITU (Geneva, 2014). Available from https://www.itu.int/pub/D-PHCB-SIS_A.01-2014.

[35] ECE (July 2016). Available from http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Promoting-People-first-Public-Private-Partnerships-PPPs-for-the-UN-SDGs_UNECE_IATF-Issue-Brief.pdf.

stakeholders, including the citizens who are the main beneficiaries of infrastructure and public services.

106. Frameworks that facilitate access to information and promote inclusive governance and participatory decision-making are critical to advancing social inclusion. The Economic Commission for Europe hosts the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. This legal instrument provides a solid framework for Governments to ensure transparency, effective public engagement and the required remedies in relation to both the protection of the environment and human rights. The Convention empowers the public, including individuals, non-governmental organizations, local communities and other stakeholders, to access environmental information, participate in decision-making and have access to justice. It also places great emphasis on the protection of the rights of whistle-blowers and environmental activists.

107. Owing to the cross-cutting nature of the instrument, it is applicable throughout the 2030 Agenda, including in regard to goals related to environmental matters, good governance, health, well-being and the reduction of inequalities.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

108. With the overarching commitment to leave no one behind, the historic and ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that development will be sustainable only if it is inclusive. Member States, civil society and other stakeholders have acknowledged that promoting social inclusion with a central goal of attaining social integration is fundamental to achieving a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future. Consequently, targeted measures to address the distinct obstacles faced by disadvantaged, marginalized or otherwise excluded social groups have been enacted. In particular, special efforts have been undertaken to overcome the barriers to participation in civil, political, social and cultural life that some groups face.

109. Moreover, several Member States have introduced policies aimed at tackling discrimination, as well as providing preferential access to some services and enabling the participation of excluded persons and communities in decision-making processes.

110. In addition, efforts to promote new forms of inclusion, such as digital inclusion, have recently emerged as a growing priority in national contexts. Digital inclusion and e-government initiatives have been found to further contribute to better public participation in the civil, political and economic life of every society.

111. Nevertheless, to ensure full inclusion of vulnerable groups in societies, it is vital to continue aiming at building a culture of inclusiveness, by changing the norms underpinning or perpetuating unequal power relations and disadvantage experienced by some social groups, including migrants and refugees in host countries. As noted in the present report, human rights education initiatives have an often untapped potential to contribute to this goal. It is also essential to maintain a gender perspective in all social integration efforts.

B. Recommendations

112. To contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments are strongly encouraged:

(a) To promote the civil, political and economic participation of youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups, through, inter alia, promoting their involvement in political processes; access to credit; and vocational training and employment support services for all groups;

(b) To ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making processes in the design and implementation of social policies and programmes, through, inter alia, investments in digital inclusion and e-government initiatives increasing public participation in civil, political and economic life;

(c) To pursue anti-discrimination measures through appropriate legislation, educational curriculums, media campaigns and other measures;

(d) To ensure inclusion of a gender perspective in all social inclusion strategies and initiatives, especially in terms of the economic empowerment of women and a gender-sensitive policy environment in the workplace;

(e) To continue sharing good practices, including through relevant United Nations forums, to increase civil, political and economic participation; and to ensure inclusive decision-making processes and anti-discriminatory measures and other measures to promote social integration through social inclusion to ensure that no one is left behind.